

FEAR

HERE ARE TALES THAT WILL USHER YOU INTO

# THE HAUNT OF



NO. 25



REPRINT  
EDITION

# FEAR<sup>®</sup>

FEATURING...



THE OLD WITCH



THE VAULT-KEEPER



THE CRYPT-KEEPER

GUINNESS





# THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! FOND FELICITATIONS, FREAKS! COME INTO THE HAUNT OF FEAR... THE REVOLTING RESTAURANT OF REEKING RECITATIONS, SQUAT DOWN AT THE TERROR-TABLE THERE, AND GET READY FOR SOME GORY GORGINGS OF GRUESOME GAGGINGS. YEP, IT'S YOUR SHIVER-CHEF, THE OLD WITCH, STIRRING UP HER CRAUDDY CAULDRON, READY TO METE OUT HER MORBID MENU. TODAY'S TIDBITS INCLUDE MOLDY MILK, WHIPPED SCREAM, PUTRID PABLUM, FOUL FARINA AND CHOPPED OOD LIVERS. ALL BABY FOODS! PERFECT CHILDISH CHEW-INGS SLOPPED PAST YOUR GREEDY GUMS TO WHET YOUR APPETITE FOR THE MAIN COURSE... A DISGUSTING DISH CALLED...

## THE NEW ARRIVAL

TAKE A GOOD LONG LOOK AT ME. NOT VERY PRETTY, EH? I'M JUST AN OLD, DILAPIDATED, WEATHER-BEATEN, PAINT-STARVED, ONCE-PROUD MANSION NOW! I'VE KNOWN BETTER DAYS... THE DAYS WHEN I WAS BRIGHT AND NEW AND PROUD, WITH CRYSTAL WINDOWS, DRESSED UP IN FRESH CLEAN COATS OF PAINT, STANDING STATELY UPON A LUSH GREEN LAWN. BUT THOSE DAYS ARE GONE. GONE AND ALMOST FORGOTTEN. NOW, PEOPLE SHUN ME... HURRY PAST ME IN DREAD... AS IF I WERE A HAUNTED HOUSE...





WELL, THAT'S WHAT I *AM*. A HAUNTED HOUSE! *NOT* THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF *HORROR TRADITION*, WITH BLOOD-STAINED STAIRCASES AND REENACTMENTS OF EVIL DEEDS ECHOING DOWN MY MUSTY OLD CORRIDORS, AND GHOSTS OF LONG-DEAD OCCUPANTS FLITTING AND SWIRLING THROUGH MY EMPTY PLASTER-CRACKED ROOMS, WAILING AND CLANKING CHAINS. *NO!* I'M A *DIFFERENT* KIND OF HAUNTED HOUSE. I'M HAUNTED BY A HORRIBLE *LIVING SECRET*. THERE'S *ANOTHER* KIND OF WAILING WITHIN ME. LISTEN...

YES, THE CRIES OF A *CHILD* VIBRATE WITHIN MY ROTTING SHELL...THE SQUALLING OF A *BABY!* WHAT'S *WRONG* WITH *THAT*, YOU ASK? ISN'T THAT A PERFECTLY *NORMAL* THING FOR A BABY TO DO... *CRY? PERHAPS!* BUT *THIS* BABY IS *DYING!* IT'S DYING OF...WHAT'S *THAT?* THAT *SOUND* IN THE NIGHT...COMING *CLOSER?* IT'S THE CHURNING OF AN *AUTOMOBILE'S* STRAINING ENGINE... COMING ALONG THE OLD ROAD THAT RUNS BY ME!...



A-WAHHH...A-WAHHH...A-WAAHHHH...

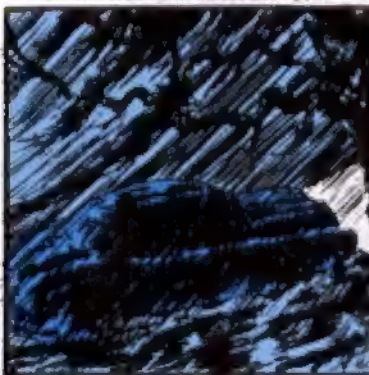
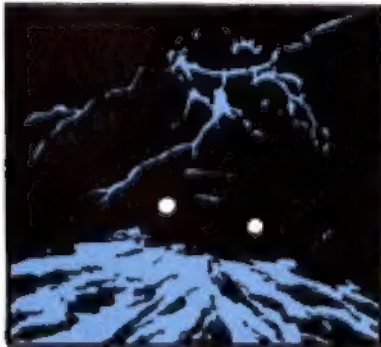


RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR...

WHO WOULD BE *FOOL* ENOUGH TO BE *OUT* IN THIS DISMAL NIGHT OF POURING RAIN AND LURID LIGHTNING FLASHES THAT LIFT THE CURTAIN OF DARK MOMENTARILY FROM TIME TO TIME? THERE IT *COMES*, DOWN THE UNPAVED DIRT ROAD, NOW JUST A RUTTED QUAGMIRE OF MUD...

A *CAR*, SCARCELY *DRAWING* ITSELF THROUGH THE CLINGING SLUDGE. BUT...*NO...NO, IT MUSTN'T STOP. IT MUSTN'T. KEEP GOING PAST ME! DON'T STOP HERE!* IT WOULD BE *DANGEROUS* FOR YOU TO *STOP HERE... TONIGHT!*

I FEEL MY ANCIENT TIMBERS GROANING AS THE WHEELS SPIN USELESSLY, SINKING DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE MUD. I FEEL A SHIVER RUN THROUGH MY EAVES AS THE DRIVER STEPS FROM THE STUCK CAR...CURSING.



BLAST...

HE STARES HOPELESSLY AT HIS MINED AUTOMOBILE, AND THEN TURNS, SQUINTING INTO THE DARKNESS. *DON'T! DON'T LOOK TOWARD ME! PLEASE, DON'T...*

I'LL KEEP *UTTERLY SILENT* AND TRY TO *HIDE* MYSELF BEHIND THE CLOAK OF NIGHT. PERHAPS HE'LL WALK ON DOWN THE ROAD. PERHAPS HE WON'T *SEE ME*. PERHAPS...OH, *DEAR!* THAT *LIGHTNING FLASH* *SILHOUETTES ME* AGAINST THE FLUID SKY...



GOT TO FIND A PLACE TO SPEND THE NIGHT. I WONDER IF THERE ARE ANY *HOUSES* IN THIS GOD-FORSAKEN TERRITORY...



WHAT LUCK! THERE'S *ONE...CLOSE BY...*

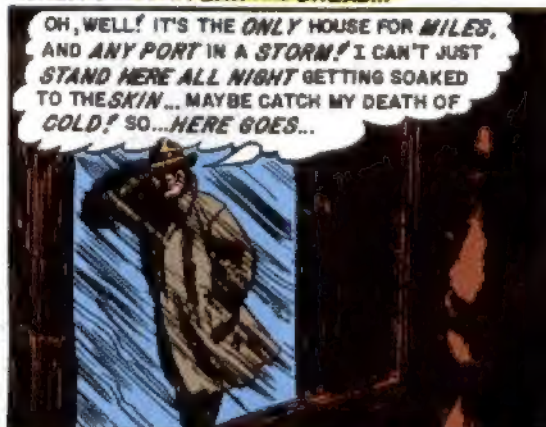


WHAT LUCK! HE SAYS! THE POOR FOOL! BAD LUCK! NOW HE'S SLOSHING TOWARD ME. I'VE GOT TO DISCOURAGE HIM... GOT TO DRIVE HIM AWAY... FOR HIS OWN SAKE. I'LL BANG MY SHUTTERS CLOSED, HIDING THE DIM LIGHT FROM THE NURSERY, CONCEALING THE FACT THAT SOMEONE LIVES HERE. PERHAPS HE'LL BE FRIGHTENED THEN AT MY BROODING EMPTY UNFRIENDLY APPEARANCE AND GO AWAY...

HE'S HESITATING, SHIVERING AT MY GRIM FOREBODING AIR. I'M WINNING! I'M... OH, THE IDIOT! HE'S THINKING LOGICALLY... PLACING PRACTICALITY ABOVE FEAR AND DREAD...



HMMM! SURE IS AN EERIE LOOKING PLACE. I'D HATE TO SPEND A NIGHT IN... IN THERE...

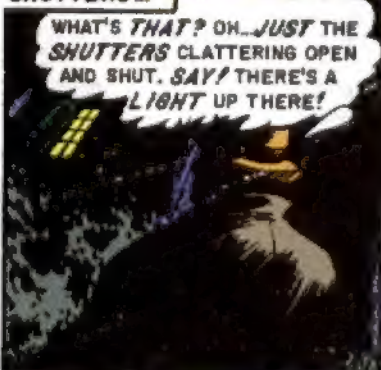


OH, WELL! IT'S THE ONLY HOUSE FOR MILES, AND ANY PORT IN A STORM! I CAN'T JUST STAND HERE ALL NIGHT GETTING SOAKED TO THE SKIN... MAYBE CATCH MY DEATH OF GOLD! SO... HERE GOES...

HERE HE COMES AGAIN. WHAT CAN I DO TO STOP HIM? IF I COULD ONLY SCREAM A WARNING. IF I COULD ONLY SHOUT, "STOP! DON'T COME HERE! NOT TONIGHT! GO AWAY! DON'T ENTER MY DOOR OR YOU'RE LOST!" BUT ALAS, I CANNOT SCREAM. WAIT! I CAN BANG MY SHUTTERS...

IT DOESN'T FRIGHTEN HIM! WHAT ELSE CAN I DO? NOTHING BUT LET THE WIND WHISTLE AND SIGH MOURNFULLY THROUGH MY CHINKS AND CREVICES...

BUT STILL HE COMES. WHAT ELSE? THE BATS! OF COURSE! PEOPLE ARE FRIGHTENED OF BATS. EASY TO RATTLE MY RAFTERS AND CHASE A FLOCK FROM MY ATTIC...



WHAT'S THAT? OH... JUST THE SHUTTERS CLATTERING OPEN AND SHUT. SAY! THERE'S A LIGHT UP THERE!



HUH? AW, O'MON, LOCKWOOD! IT'S JUST THE WIND... HOWLING PAST THE EAVES...



WHAT THE...? OH... JUST A BUNCH OF BATS! I MUST HAVE FRIGHTENED THEM. THEY WON'T BOTHER ME...

HE'S YOUNG AND STUBBORN. NOTHING SCARES HIM OFF. HE'S INSISTANT UPON WALKING INTO THE HORROR THAT LURKS WITHIN MY MOULDERING WALLS. HE'S ALMOST TO THE PORCH NOW. AT THE RISK OF HURTING HIM, I'LL SHAKE PART OF MY ROTTING EAVES DOWN UPON HIM!...

HE JUMPS ASIDE NIMBLY. HE KEEPS COMING. ONE LAST CHANCE. THE LOOSE BOARD IN MY PORCH STEPS. THERE!



HEY!



OOOOF!



OH, HOW STUBBORN CAN HE BE? HE JUST PICKS HIMSELF UP AND CALLS HIMSELF 'CLUMSY'! IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE ME BLOW MY ROOF! HE'S DEFIED ALL MY ATTEMPTS TO SEND HIM FLEEING. NOW, HE'S AT MY FRONT DOOR... KNOCKING... NOT KNOWING HE'S BEGGING ENTRY INTO A HIDEOUS TRAP...



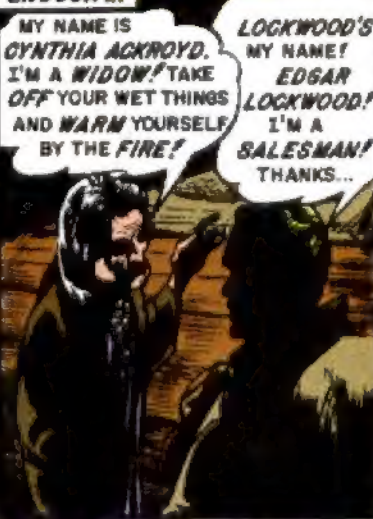
MY DOOR CREAKS OPEN ON HINGES THAT HAVE NOT TASTED OIL FOR LONG, LONG YEARS. HE'S SHOCKED AT THE FACE THAT APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY... ONE OF THOSE YOUNG-OLD FACES, WRINKLED AS IF WITH GREAT AGE, YET STAMPED WITH A KIND OF YOUTHFULNESS...



I... I'M SORRY TO DISTURB YOU AT THIS HOUR... BUT, YOU SEE, MY CAR GOT STUCK IN THE MUD, AND I...

OH, YOU POOR MAN! COME IN OUT OF THE RAIN!

SEE HOW EAGERLY SHE WELCOMES HIM. HE'S TAKING IT AS A SIGN OF HOSPITALITY! OH, WHAT AN IDIOT! WELL, HE'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH...



MY NAME IS CYNTHIA ACKROYD. I'M A WIDOW! TAKE OFF YOUR WET THINGS AND WARM YOURSELF BY THE FIRE!

LOCKWOOD'S MY NAME! EDGAR LOCKWOOD! I'M A SALESMAN! THANKS...

SUDDENLY THE MEWLING SOUNDS START... THE CRYING... COMING FROM UP THE OLD WINDING STAIRS... COMING FROM THE NURSERY...



A-WAHH... A-WAHHHH! OH, PLEASE EXCUSE YOUR ME! MY BABY IS CRYING!

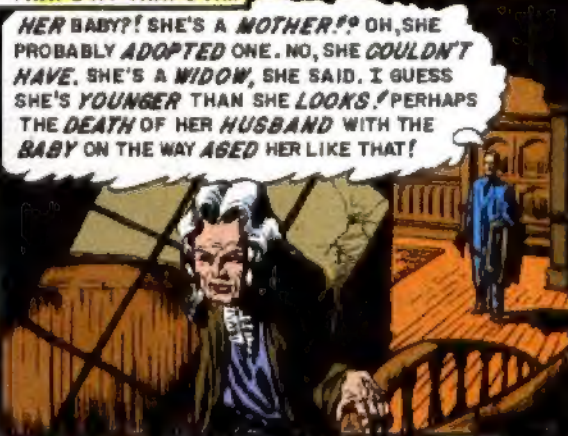
WHAT A PITIFUL FOOL! WHY ARE ALL HUMAN BEINGS SO LOGICAL WHEN THEY WANT TO BE? WHY DIDN'T HE TAKE MY WARNING? HE DOESN'T EVEN SUSPECT, AS MRS. ACKROYD RETURNS...



THE BABY'S STILL CRYING! IT SOUNDS AS THOUGH IT'S IN PAIN!

HE IS, MR. LOCKWOOD! MY BABY IS RATHER ILL! BUT EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT!

WATCH HER CLIMB THE STAIRS, LOCKWOOD. HER BABY? USE YOUR HEAD! THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MINUTE. THAT'S IT! THAT'S IT...



HER BABY? SHE'S A MOTHER! OH, SHE PROBABLY ADOPTED ONE. NO, SHE COULDN'T HAVE. SHE'S A WIDOW, SHE SAID. I GUESS SHE'S YOUNGER THAN SHE LOOKS! PERHAPS THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND WITH THE BABY ON THE WAY AGED HER LIKE THAT!



POOR THING! CAN'T YOU PHONE FOR THE DOCTOR?

THERE'S NO PHONE HERE, MR. LOCKWOOD. NOW, DON'T YOU TROUBLE YOURSELF. I'VE DOCTORED MY LITTLE DUMPLING THROUGH MANY A CRISIS!



BUT THE AGUISHED HOWLS OF THE BABY **DISTURB** YOU, DON'T THEY, LOCKWOOD? YOU FEEL **SORRY** FOR THE LITTLE TYKE... MAKE ONE MORE GALLANT OFFER...

CAN I GO **FETCH** THE DOCTOR, MRS. ACKROYD? MY **CAR** IS STUCK BUT I COULD MAKE IT ON **FOOT**! I MEAN, IF YOUR BABY'S **LIFE** IS IN DANGER...

YES, LOCKWOOD! **GO! RUSH** FOR A DOCTOR! **LEAVE!** ANY EXCUSE! **JUST DON'T COME BACK. GO AHEAD!** DON'T **LISTEN** TO HER...

YOU'RE SWEET TO OFFER, MR. LOCKWOOD, BUT IT'S **NOTHING**, REALLY! MY BABY ISN'T **THAT** SICK!

BUT THAT PITIFUL **WAILING!** SO **LOUD**...

HE'S **JUST HUNGRY!** IT'S TIME FOR HIS **BOTTLE**. THIS WILL **QUIET** HIM...

MAY I **HELP?** MAY I **SEE** YOUR BABY, MRS. ...?

**NO!** YOU **CAN'T** SEE HIM! UH... THAT IS... YOU **MIGHT** CATCH HIS **GERMS**. NO USE **RISKING** YOUR **HEALTH**, MR. LOCKWOOD! YOU **JUST STAY DOWN** HERE TILL I **TAKE CARE** OF DUMPLING! I **WON'T** BE **LONG**!

ALL RIGHT, MRS. ACKROYD!

DON'T YOU THINK IT'S **ODD**, MR. LOCKWOOD? DON'T YOU **SEE**, NOW? DON'T YOU SENSE WHY EVERY MOMENT YOU **SPEND** HERE IS MARCHING YOU CLOSER AND CLOSER TO A **NIGHT-MARISH FATE**? DON'T YOU **SEE?** OF **COURSE NOT**, YOU FOOL! INSTEAD, YOU **LISTEN** TO THE AGE-OLD HEART-WARMING SOUNDS DRIFTING DOWN TO YOU FROM THE NURSERY DOOR... THE SOUNDS OF THE LOVING MOTHER AND HER CHILD. AND YOU **SMILE**...

MUMMERS' 'ITTLE DUMPLIN' DARLIN' IS HUNGRY... ISN'T HE? HASUM GOT NAUGHTY PAINS? MY POOR BABY! HERE'S SOME NICE WARM MILK...

CAN'T YOU HEAR MY BEAMS GROANING IN DISMAY, MR. LOCKWOOD? LOOK AROUND YOU! LOOK AROUND FOR A CLUE TO HER SINISTER SECRET...

OH, WELL! MOTHERS ARE **QUEER** ABOUT THEIR KIDS... **OVERLY PROTECTIVE**... **SHIELDING**. SHE PROBABLY FIGURED I'M THE ONE WITH THE **GERMS!** SHE... WHAT'S **THIS?**

AH, **THAT'S IT!** THE **FRAMED PICTURE** ON THE DUST-COVERED PIANO! PICK IT UP, LOCKWOOD! PICK IT UP AND READ THE **INSCRIPTION. STUDY IT!**

'TO MY DARLING CYNTHIA...1917'



SEE THE **UNIFORM** ON THE MAN, MR. LOCKWOOD? RECOGNIZE IT?...

HMMM! WAY BACK FROM **WORLD WAR ONE**... A **MEMENTO** SENT BY HER **FATHER**!

**NO, YOU IDIOT! NOT HER FATHER!** GUESS AGAIN! THIS IS A CLUE THAT CAN SAVE YOU. MAKE THE RIGHT GUESS AND YOU'LL RUN AND RUN AS IF DEMONS WERE AT YOUR HEELS. **HURRY! SHE'S COMING...**

OH! YOU'VE FOUND HIS **PICTURE**? HE WAS **KILLED** GOING OVER THE TOP IN **1918**!

I'M **SO SORRY!** YOU MUST HAVE BEEN JUST A **GIRL** WHEN YOUR FATHER **DIED**...

**SHE** WON'T DENY IT'S HER FATHER, MR. LOCKWOOD! SHE WOULDN'T TELL YOU THE TRUTH! NOT SHE! THAT WOULD SPOIL IT ALL FOR HER, DON'T YOU SEE THE SECRET SMILE ON HER FACE? **STOP YAWNING! WAKE UP...**

IF YOU DON'T MIND, I'D LIKE TO GO TO BED NOW!

CERTAINLY! COME! I'LL SHOW YOU YOUR ROOM!

IT'S NOT AN ELEGANT ROOM, MR. LOCKWOOD, NONE OF MINE ARE NOW. YOU UNDRESS, BLOW OUT THE CANDLE, AND SINK WITH EXHAUSTION INTO THE MUSTY OLD SOFT BED. AND YOU SLEEP. YOU SLEEP UNTIL YOU'RE AWAKENED BY...

A-WAAHHHHHHH!  
A-WAAHHHHHHHHH!

THE **BABY** AGAIN...

THAT'S IT, LOCKWOOD! GET UP! PACE THE FLOOR! THAT'S IT! **THINK!**...

I **CAN'T** SLEEP WITH **THAT** GOING ON! BUT THAT CRYING IS **ODD** SOMEHOW! **NOT** JUST PAIN! SOMETHING **ELSE!** SOMETHING I CAN'T PUT MY **FINGER** ON!

DOES IT **COME** TO YOU NOW, LOCKWOOD? LISTEN **CAREFULLY!** WHY DOES THAT BABY'S PITIFUL MEWLING STRIKE YOU AS **DIFFERENT?** WHY? WHY?...

I **KNOW!** IT'S **TOO LOUD!** HOW CAN A SMALL BABY CRY SO **LOUD?**

THAT'S **IT**, LOCKWOOD, YOU'RE ON THE **RIGHT TRACK!** **HURRY!** DISCOVER THE **TRUTH** AND **LEAVE** MY MOULDERING TERROR-FILLED INSIDES. **RUN!** RUN FROM ME BEFORE IT'S **TOO LATE**...

I'VE GOT TO **SEE** THAT **BABY!** I'VE GOT TO... **WHAT'S THIS?**



YES! YES! YOUR DOOR IS LOCKED. SHE LOCKED YOU IN. WHY? TO PREVENT EXACTLY THIS...

NOW I KNOW SOMETHING'S WRONG! SHE WANTS TO KEEP ME FROM TAKING A LOOK AT THAT BABY!



THAT'S IT, LOCKWOOD! PUT YOUR SHOULDER TO THE DOOR! HEAVE! I'LL HELP YOU! I'LL WARP AND BUCKLE THE ROTTED JAMB... LOOSEN MY HOLD ON THE HINGES! THERE...

NOW WE'LL SEE WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT!



NO ONE HEARD... NOT ABOVE THAT LOUD, LOUD CATERWAULING OF HER SICK BABY. GO ON, LOCKWOOD... DOWN THE DIM HALLWAY... TO THE NURSERY DOOR. LOOK OUT!...

DOPS!



PICK IT UP, LOCKWOOD! LOOK AT IT! STRANGE, ISN'T IT?...

A RAG DOLL, SEWN TOGETHER FROM SCRAPS! BUT WHY WOULD SHE MAKE ONE SO BIG?



LISTEN, LOCKWOOD! STAND OUTSIDE THE NURSERY DOOR AND LISTEN! HEAR IT? HEAR IT?...

IT'S SURE LOUD, ALL RIGHT! BUT THEN, OF COURSE, ALL SOUNDS SEEM LOUDER AT NIGHT... CONTRASTING AGAINST THE STILLNESS. ESPECIALLY A BABY'S CRY ...



NO, LOCKWOOD! DON'T THINK OF SILLY EXPLANATIONS! DON'T GIVE UP AND GO BACK NOW. LISTEN! LISTEN TO THE OTHER SOUNDS... THE SOUNDS BESIDES THE BABY'S SQUEALING...

WHAT'S THAT? THE CLANKING OF CHAINS! WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE!



PUSH OPEN THE DOOR, LOCKWOOD! PUSH OPEN THE NURSERY DOOR AND SEE!...

OH, MY LORD... CHOKO...





YES, MR. LOCKWOOD! THAT'S HER 'BABY'! THAT'S 'DUMPLING'!  
LOOK AT HIM. LOOK AT HIM AND BE SICK...

A...GAGG...A  
GROWN MAN!



YES, LOCKWOOD! THAT PHOTO WASN'T OF HER  
FATHER! THAT WAS HER HUSBAND, MRS.  
ACKROYD IS ALMOST 70! HER "BABY" IS ALMOST  
40! THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND DURING THE  
WAR, LEAVING HER A WIDOW WITH AN INFANT SON,  
HAD UNHINGED HER MIND...

HE'S DYING! MY BABY  
IS DYING!

YOU!!



SHE COMES AT YOU, SAVAGELY. SHE'S JUST LIKE SHE  
WAS ALMOST 40 YEARS AGO, WANTING *DESPERATELY* TO  
KEEP HER INFANT *FOREVER YOUNG*... THE *IMAGE* OF  
HIS *FATHER*... *WITH HER ALWAYS*! SHE NEVER TAUGHT  
HIM TO *WALK* OR *TALK*. SHE KEPT HIM A *BABY IN MIND*  
AS HE GREW TO *MANHOOD IN BODY*. AND *NOW*, THIS  
NIGHT, HE IS *DYING*. AND *YOU*, YOU FOOL! YOU HAD TO  
*BLUNDER IN*. YOU HAD TO LET HER *SURPRISE* YOU...

...YOU HAD TO LET HER FIND YOU STARING DOWN AT HER  
MANACLED BABY WITH YOUR BACK TURNED TO HER. YOU  
HAD TO LET HER COME UP BEHIND YOU WITH THE CLUB.  
YOU HAD TO WATCH THE BLACKNESS CLOSE IN AS SHE  
STRUCK...

BUT I'LL HAVE A NEW  
BABY NOW!

NO!  
NO!



AND NOW, AS THE BLACKNESS FADES, YOU CAN SEE YOUR *FUTURE*, LOCK-  
WOOD...*CLEARLY*! YOU CAN SEE WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO *GO*  
*THROUGH* FOR THE *REST OF YOUR LIFE*! I *WARNED* YOU! I *TRIED*! I  
*REALLY DID*!...

OH, YOU SWEETUMS! 'ITTLE DUMPLING!  
MOMMY LOVE YOU! MOMMY TAKE CARE OF YOU!  
IZZUM SLEEPY? ROCK-A-BYE BABY... IN  
THE TREE TOP...WHEN THE WIND BLOWS...



AND IT'S TIME FOR ME TO BLOW,  
KIDDIES! THE VAULT-KEEPER  
AWAITS WITH A *DELIGHTFUL* LITTLE  
TALE FROM *HIS* COLLECTION. I'LL  
BE BACK LATER TO FEED YOU *MORE*  
*FOUL FARE* FROM MY *GRUDDY*  
*CAULDRON*! OH, AS FOR POOR MR.  
LOCKWOOD, I WOULDN'T WORRY  
ABOUT HIM. HE'S REALLY HAPPY  
NOW. SEEMS HE LOST HIS *MIND*!

TOO MUCH HITTING  
THE *BOTTLE*, I  
GUESS! THE  
*SUCKER*! WELL,  
I GOTTA DELIVER  
SOME *DIAPERS*  
TO DEAR MRS.  
ACKROYD. SHE  
USES *OLD*  
*SHROUDS*.  
'BYE!





# THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! WELL, THIS IS THE SECOND OF THAT TERRIBLE TRIO OF LOATHSOME LAMENTS... THE GHOULNATICS... SPOOKING. THIS IS YOUR REVOLTING RELATER OF RABID ROMANCES, YOUR VAULT-KEEPER, READY TO REVEAL A RESURGITATING RUBBISH-YARN. I CALL THIS MOROSE MESS OF A MEMOIR...

## INDISPOSED!

HENRY GRINNED DOWN INTO THE BLOODY KITCHEN SINK, AND LISTENED WITH RAPTURE AND RELIEF AS THE BRAND NEW GARBAGE DISPOSAL UNIT STOPPED GRINDING AND SUCKING AND CHATTERING AND BEGAN TO HUM SMOOTHLY. IT HAD DONE ITS JOB WELL. HENRY SIGHED WITH SATISFACTION, STOOPED, OPENED THE CABINET DOORS BELOW THE SINK, AND SWITCHED THE UNIT OFF. THE SILENCE OF THE HOUSE CLOSED IN AROUND HIM. HE TURNED AND KNELT AND BEGAN SPONGING UP THE POOL OF SCARLET ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR...

GOOD-BYE, RITA! AND GOOD RIDDANCE...



HENRY WORKED SWIFTLY AND METICULOUSLY, WRINGING OUT THE BLOOD INTO THE SINK, THEN LATHERING THE LINOLEUM TILL IT GLEAMED CLEAN.

GOT TO HURRY! THE BOYS WILL BE HERE ANY MINUTE!





HE SCOURED THE SINK CAREFULLY, RINSED OUT THE SPONGE, AND DRIED HIS CLEAN WET HANDS ON A NEW KITCHEN TOWEL. EVERYTHING HAD BEEN TAKEN CARE OF. THERE WAS NO TRACE... NO SIGN... NOTHING TO ATTEST TO THE HIDEOUS DEED HE'D JUST COMMITTED. HENRY SHOT A QUICK GLANCE AT THE CLOCK...

TOOK ME LONGER THAN I EXPECTED IT WOULD! I'D BETTER GET DRESSED. IT'S ALMOST TIME...



HIS GLANCE FELL UPON THE CLEAVER AND THE HACK-SAW AND THE RAZOR-SHARP KITCHEN KNIFE LYING ON THE FORMICA SIDEBBOARD, WIPE CLEAN OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN HIS FOUL ACCOMPLISHMENT...

DOUGHT TO PUT THOSE THINGS AWAY!



HE INSERTED THE KNIFE IN ITS WALL-RACK, HUNG THE CLEAVER ON ITS HOOK BELOW AND SLID THE HACK-SAW INTO THE TOOL DRAWER...

RITA NEVER LIKED MY TOOL DRAWER. IT WAS ALWAYS A MESS, SHE USED TO SAY. *HHNNNN!* WELL, SHE WON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT THAT ANYMORE!



THE KITCHEN SPARKLED. HENRY TOOK ONE LAST LOOK AROUND, SATISFIED THAT EVERYTHING WAS PERFECT, AND SWITCHED OFF THE LIGHT. HE MOVED DOWN THE HALL TO THE BEDROOM, STEPPED OUT OF HIS RED-SPOTTED OVERALLS, REMOVED HIS CRIMSON-SMEARED SHIRT, AND STUFFED THEM INTO THE BATH-ROOM LAUNDRY HAMPER...

I'LL WASH THESE THINGS OUT TONIGHT WHEN THE GANG HAS GONE.



HE DRESSED QUICKLY... SLACKS... SPORTS SHIRT... THE WAY HE ALWAYS LIKED TO DRESS... THE WAY RITA NEVER LET HIM. DOWN THE HALL, THE FRONT DOORBELL RINGED SOFTLY...

OH-OH! THEY'RE HERE ALREADY!



HE CHECKED HIMSELF IN THE MIRROR, RAN A COMB SWIFTLY THROUGH HIS THINNING HAIR, AND HURRIED TO THE DOOR...

SHE GONE, HENRY?

SHE'S GONE!

LUCKY DEVIL!

WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY. EH, HENRY?



THEY MOVED INTO THE LIVING ROOM... LAUGHING... JOKING... CONGRATULATING HENRY UPON HIS GOOD FORTUNE...

BOY, I WISH MY WIFE WOULD GO TO FLORIDA FOR A FEW WEEKS, HENRY!

GUESS YOU WON'T BE HOME MUCH THESE NIGHTS, EH, BOY?

WELL, WOLF THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO HOWL!



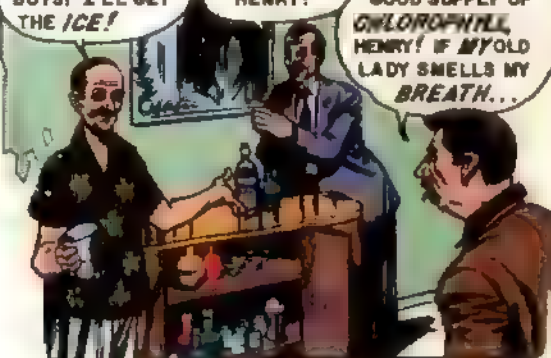


HENRY LAUGHED GOOD-NATUREDLY, OPENING THE BAR-CONSOLE, LIFTING OUT THE GLASSES, THE WHISKEY, THE SODA...

OPEN 'EM UP, BOYS! I'LL GET THE ICE!

ATTA BOY, HENRY!

HOPE YOU GOT A GOOD SUPPLY OF CHLOROPHYLL, HENRY! IF MY OLD LADY SMELLS MY BREATH...



HENRY WENT INTO THE KITCHEN...TURNED ON THE LIGHT... LOOKED AROUND. FOR A MOMENT, HIS HEART STOPPED. THERE WAS A BLOOD SPOT IN THE SINK. HE HURRIED TO IT AND WIPE IT UP WITH A SPITTLE-DAMPENED FINGER AS SOMEBODY CAME UP BEHIND HIM...

HOW'D RITA LIKE THE GARBAGE DISPOSAL UNIT, HENRY?

OH, FINE, GEORGE! FINE!



HE WONDERED FOR A MOMENT IF GEORGE HAD SEEN... HE WONDERED IF GEORGE COULD HEAR HIS HEART BEATING SO WILDLY IN HIS CHEST. HE STEPPED TO THE REFRIGERATOR DOOR... SWUNG IT OPEN...

YOU KNOW WHAT I WOULD HAVE CHARGED AN ORDINARY CUSTOMER FOR THAT INSTALLATION, HENRY?

PLENTY, I'LL BET, GEORGE!



...AND REMOVED AN ICE-CUBE TRAY...

THREE TIMES AS MUCH, HENRY! MAYBE FOUR. YOU GOT A REAL BARGAIN!

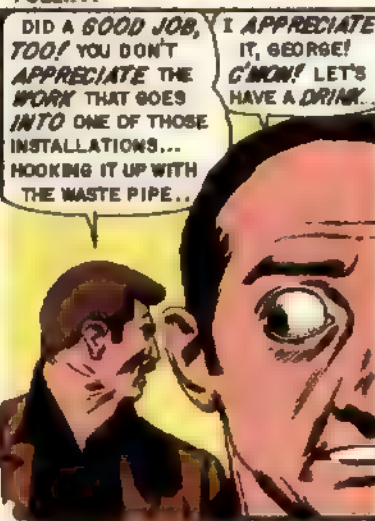
THANKS, GEORGE! IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A PLUMBER AS A FRIEND!



GEORGE FOLLOWED HENRY OUT OF THE KITCHEN, GLANCING BACK WISTFULLY...

DID A GOOD JOB, TOO! YOU DON'T APPRECIATE THE WORK THAT GOES INTO ONE OF THOSE INSTALLATIONS... HOOKING IT UP WITH THE WASTE PIPE...

I APPRECIATE IT, GEORGE! G'NONE! LET'S HAVE A DRINK...

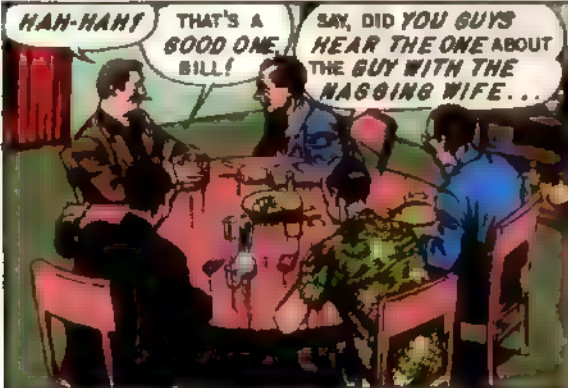


THE WHISKY AND ICE AND SODA SEEMED TO BRING WARMTH INTO THE LIVING ROOM. HENRY SAT BACK SMILING... LISTENING TO THE IDLE CHATTER... THE LATEST JOKE... THE LAUGHTER. HENRY WAS CONTENT...

HAN-HAN!

THAT'S A GOOD ONE, BILL!

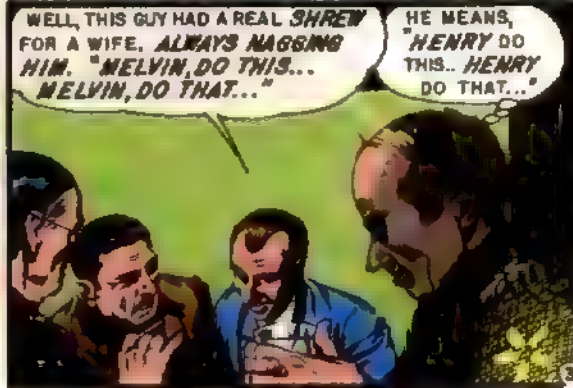
SAY, DID YOU GUYS HEAR THE ONE ABOUT THE GUY WITH THE NAGGING WIFE...



'THE GUY WITH THE NAGGING WIFE.' THAT WAS HENRY, ALL RIGHT. NOT ANYMORE, THOUGH. RITA WOULDN'T NAG HIM ANY MORE. RITA WAS DEAD. HENRY THOUGHT ABOUT RITA... THOUGHT ABOUT THE WAY IT USED TO BE...

WELL, THIS GUY HAD A REAL SHREW FOR A WIFE. ALWAYS NAGGING HIM. "MELVIN, DO THIS... MELVIN, DO THAT..."

HE MEANS, "HENRY DO THIS... HENRY DO THAT..."





YES, THAT'S THE WAY IT USED TO BE. JUST LIKE THE JOKE PHIL WAS TELLING RITA'D BEEN A SHREW. SHE'D NAGGED AND NAGGED HENRY OVER THE YEARS. UNMERCIFULLY, HENRY REMEMBERED...

LOOK AT THAT RUB! ALL TRACKED UP! HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU TO WIPE YOUR FEET BEFORE YOU COME INSIDE...

I'M SORRY, RITA...



HE REMEMBERED HOW SHE'D MAKE HIM ACCOUNT TO HER. FOR EVERYTHING...

YOU TOOK FIVE DOLLARS FOR AN ALLOWANCE THIS WEEK! WHAT HAPPENED TO IT? GO AHEAD! TELL ME! WHAT DID YOU SPEND FIVE DOLLARS ON...

PLEASE, RITA! I DIDN'T BANGLE IT AWAY. I DIDN'T DRINK IT! I SPENT IT... ON CARFARE AND LUNCHES! I... I... OH, GET A PENCIL! I'LL GIVE YOU EVERY ITEM.



HE REMEMBERED HOW SHE'D MAKE HIM MISS THOSE RARE NIGHTS OUT WITH THE BOYS...

BOWLING!? OH, NO! NOT TONIGHT! I'M COOPED UP IN THIS HOUSE ALL DAY LONG! THE LEAST YOU CAN DO IS STAY HOME WITH ME IN THE EVENING!

BUT, RITA! I DON'T ASK THAT OFTEN.



HE REMEMBERED HOW SHE'D NAG...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "YOU'RE TIRED!" SO AM I! DO YOU THINK I PLAY GAMES WHILE YOU'RE AT THE OFFICE? YOU'LL WASH THE DISHES! I'LL WIPE!

YES, RITA!



... AND NAG...

WELL, IF YOU'D MAKE MORE MONEY WE COULD AFFORD A CLOTHES DRYER! WOM, GO HANG THESE UP ON THE LINE!

YES, RITA...



... AND NAG...

MRS. GREEN DOWN THE BLOCK HAS A GARBAGE DISPOSAL UNIT. HER HUSBAND HAS CONSIDERATION. SO, UNTIL YOU CAN BUY ME ONE... YOU CAN TAKE OUT THE GARBAGE. HERE! AND THE CAN'S FULL UNDER THE SINK!

YES, RITA!



WHAT WAS IT THAT FIRST GAVE HENRY THE IDEA? HE TRIED TO REMEMBER. WAS IT THAT RADIO PROGRAM HE'D BEEN LISTENING TO WHEN RITA MADE HIM TURN IT OFF?

...WITHOUT A BODY, IT'S AWFULLY DIFFICULT TO BREAK A CASE, CHIEF. BUT JENKINS MADE ONE MISTAKE. LINE TAKES A LONG TIME! WE FOUND WHAT WAS LEFT OF HER...

FOR GOD'S SALES, TURN THAT GHOULISH THING OFF, HENRY!

YES, RITA!





OR WAS IT RITA'S NAGGING?

NOW MRS. ELLER HAS A GARBAGE DISPOSAL UNIT! SHE SAYS IT'S WONDERFUL! SHE SAYS IT GRINDS UP BONES, EVEN! SHE SAYS...

YES, RITA!

HENRY WASN'T QUITE SURE. ANYWAY, IT CAME TO HIM THE NIGHT... JUST LIKE THAT! THE PERFECT WAY TO GET RID OF RITA. NO BODY! NO TRACE!

WELL, HENRY! LONG TIME NO SEE! HOW COME YOU AIN'T BEEN BOWLING WITH US?

OH, RITA DOESN'T LET ME, GEORGE! LISTEN! I... I WANT INFORMATION!

SOME'D GONE TO GEORGE. GEORGE HAD A FRIEND, GEORGE HAD A PLUMBER. AND HE'D ASKED HIM...

GEORGE, HOW MUCH WOULD A GARBAGE DISPOSAL UNIT COST?

I COULD FIND OUT, HENRY! WHY? THINKING OF GIVING THE WIFE A PRESENT?

YES, GEORGE! I'M THINKING OF SURPRISING HER!

WELL, HENRY, I'LL TELL YOU, SINCE YOU'RE MY FRIEND, I'LL DO IT CHEAP. THEY SEEM TO BE GETTING POPULAR AND I NEED THE EXPERIENCE OF INSTALLING ONE. NEVER HAD A CHANCE BEFORE...

...SO, I'LL CHARGE YOU FOR MATERIALS ONLY. LABOR IS FREE. WHATEVER IT COSTS ME, IT COSTS YOU. WE'LL BOTH BE DOING EACH OTHER A FAVOR! FAIR ENOUGH?

FAIR ENOUGH, GEORGE! THANKS! THANKS A LOT!

THEN HE'D ANNOUNCED TO HIS WIFE...

I... I THINK YOU OUGHT TO GO TO FLORIDA FOR A FEW WEEKS, RITA. YOU HAVEN'T BEEN LOOKING WELL! I'VE GOT A BONUS COMING, AND...

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND, HENRY? YOU TRYING TO GET RID OF ME!

GET RID OF YOU, RITA? WHY I'D BE LOST WITHOUT YOU! ABSOLUTELY LOST! I JUST THOUGHT...

I HAVE BEEN LOOKING BADLY LATELY! YES, HENRY! I THINK I WILL GO TO FLORIDA.



RITA'D ACTED EXACTLY AS HENRY HAD EXPECTED. SHE'D BLABBED TO ALL THE NEIGHBORS...



THAT'S RIGHT! I'M OFF TO FLORIDA TOMORROW NIGHT! HENRY GOT A BONUS! I JUST HOPE HE BEHAVES HIMSELF WHILE I'M GONE!

FLORIDA! OH, YOU LUCKY GIRL. WELL, DON'T YOU WORRY ABOUT HENRY, RITA! WE'LL KEEP OUR EYES ON HIM... GIVE YOU A FULL REPORT!

AND EARLY THIS MORNING, GEORGE'D COME WITH THE DISPOSAL UNIT. HENRY'D TIMED EVERYTHING PERFECTLY. RITA WAS BUSY PACKING...



WELL? DID YOU TELL HER ABOUT THIS, YET?

NOT YET! JUST START INSTALLING IT! IT'LL BE A SURPRISE!

RITA'D WENT INTO THE KITCHEN AND SQUEALED WITH DELIGHT...



WHAT'S THIS? OH... HENRY! A GARBAGE DISPOSAL UNIT! OH... YOU DARLING!

FOR WHEN YOU COME BACK, RITA!

AND HENRY'D TOLD GEORGE...

RITA'S LEAVING ON THE SIX O'CLOCK TRAIN, GEORGE! GET IN TOUCH WITH THE BOYS! HAVE 'EM ALL COME OVER HERE TONIGHT! ABOUT NINE...

SURE THING, HENRY! WE'LL HAVE A REGULAR STAG PARTY! HEH, HEH! SH-H-H-H-H! HERE SHE COMES!

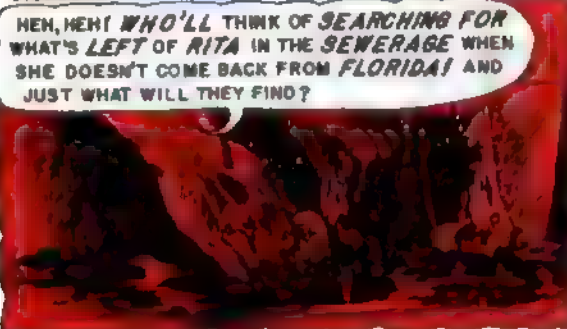


AND SO, AT 6:45 THAT EVENING, HENRY'D BACKED THE CAR OUT OF THE GARAGE AND RITA'D WAVED GOOD-BYE TO EVERYBODY AND HE'D DRIVEN HER INTO TOWN TO CATCH THE 6 P.M. TRAIN. ONLY, ON THE WAY, HE'D STOPPED, AND BEAT HER HEAD TO A BLOODY PULP...



UHHH... UHHH... UHHH...

HE'D DRIVEN BACK, TURNED INTO THE GARAGE, CLOSED THE DOORS, DRAGGED HER BODY FROM THE TRUNK, AND PROCEEDED TO DISMEMBER IT. HE'D SAWED AND HACKED AND CHOPPED IT INTO TINY PIECES AND SHOVED THEM INTO THE GROWLING, GRINDING, SUCKING GARBAGE DISPOSAL...



HEH, HEH! WHO'LL THINK OF SEARCHING FOR WHAT'S LEFT OF RITA IN THE SEWERAGE WHEN SHE DOESN'T COME BACK FROM FLORIDA! AND JUST WHAT WILL THEY FIND?

HENRY BLINKED, ERASING THE GORY SCENE FROM HIS MIND'S EYE. PHIL WAS FINISHING HIS JOKE AND EVERYBODY WAS LAUGHING...



"SURE" SHE SAYS. "HODSKIN'S THE UNDER-TAKER."

HAW-HAW!

HENRY? I'D LIKE A GLASS OF WATER! GOT SOME ON ICE?

DON'T NEED IT, NEH! WE'VE GOT OUR OWN WELL WATER!



GEORGE, THE PLUMBER, LOOKED UP...

YOU MEAN YOU  
HAVEN'T GOT  
TOWN WATER,  
HENRY?

NOPE! RITA  
MADE ME INSTALL  
OUR OWN WELL  
YEARS AGO. SHE  
SAID WE'D SAVE  
MONEY ON TAXES.



THEY ALL WENT INTO THE KITCHEN,  
LAUGHING. GEORGE LOOKED PUZZLED...

THIS I  
GOT TO  
TASTE!

WELL  
WATER!

WHEN  
I WAS  
A KID...

EXCUSE  
ME!



GEORGE WENT DOWN INTO THE  
CELLAR. HENRY TURNED TO HIS  
GUESTS...

THE WELL IS DIRECTLY UNDER  
THE HOUSE! A PUMP BRINGS  
THE WATER UP THROUGH A  
PIPE IN THE CELLAR FLOOR...



...INTO A PRESSURE TANK!  
IT'S THE GLEAREST,  
FRESHEST, BEST TASTING  
WELL WATER YOU EVER  
DRANK! HERE...

HENRY! C'MERE  
FOR A MINUTE,  
HUM?



IT WAS GEORGE. HENRY WALKED ACROSS THE KITCHEN TO  
THE CELLAR DOOR WHERE HE STOOD. THE OTHERS STARED AT  
THE FLOWING TAP...

HENRY! I... I FEEL TERRIBLE! I... I DIDN'T  
KNOW ABOUT THE WELL! I... I THOUGHT THE  
WELL WATER INTAKE WAS THE WASTE  
PIPE. I ATTACHED THE GARBAGE DISPOSAL  
UNIT TO IT! YOU... YOU HAVEN'T USED IT  
YET, HAVE YOU?

WHAT?!



HENRY SPUN AROUND. THE OTHERS... PHIL... AND BILL... AND NED... WERE  
STARING AT THE CRIMSON LIQUID AND GROUND-UP RED FRESH-SLIME THAT  
OOZED IN A CONTINUOUS SICKENING STREAM FROM THE KITCHEN FAUCET...

Y-YES, GEORGE! I...  
I USED IT!

GOOD LORD!

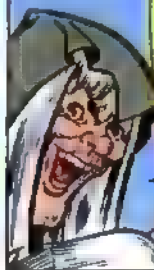
CHOKES!

GABGG...



HEH, HEH! SO HENRY... THE DRIP...  
POURED OUT A CONFESSION TO  
THE BOYS UNEXPECTEDLY, EH, KIDDIEST?  
WELL, I MIGHT CALL THIS A 'HACK'  
YARN. I MIGHT EVEN SAY I HAD TO  
'FAUCET'! BUT I WON'T! PUNS  
LIKE THAT CAN BE A 'DRAIN' ON YOUR  
PATIENCE! I'LL JUST SAY IT WAS A

YELP-YARN WITH  
EVERYTHING IN IT...  
PLUS THE KITCHEN  
SINK! HEH, HEH!  
WELL, I'LL TURN YOU  
BACK TO THE OLD  
WITCH NOW... FOR  
MORE OF HER GARBAGE!  
AND THEN C.K. WILL  
'RIND' UP THE RAG.  
'BYE!





THIS IS WHAT MIGHT HAVE  
BEEN IF RALPH HADN'T GONE

# OUT COLD

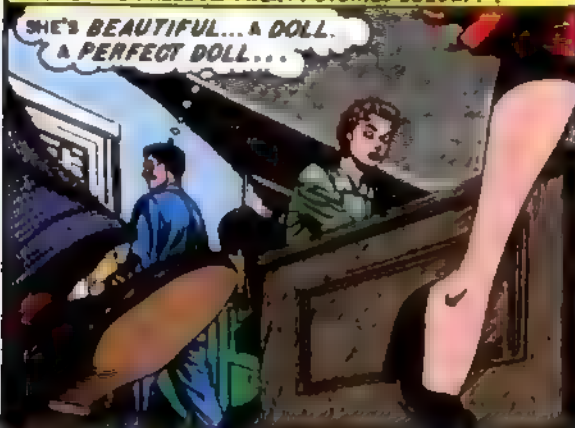


AT 5 O'CLOCK ON THE DOT, A SOFT CHIME ECHOED THROUGH THE OFFICES OF PIERCE PRODUCTS INC., ANNOUNCING TO THE RELIEVED STAFF THAT IT WAS QUITTING TIME. THE SCRATCHING OF PEN-POINTS ON LEDGERS, THE CHATTER OF TYPEWRITERS, THE CLICK-CLICK WHIRRING OF ADDING MACHINES ALL FADED AWAY. RALPH CONAN HURRIEDLY THRUST THE 'L-N' ACCOUNTS BACK INTO THEIR RESPECTIVE FOLDERS, PUSHED HIS SWIVEL CHAIR AWAY FROM HIS DESK, AND STARTED TOWARD THE FILE CABINETS. AS HE CROSSED THE OFFICE, HE KEPT LOOKING BACK AT THE NEW GIRL THEY'D JUST HIRED... THE **REDHEAD**. HE'D BEEN LOOKING AT HER ALL DAY. RALPH JUST HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO TAKE HIS EYES OFF BEAUTIFUL WILMA DOONE...



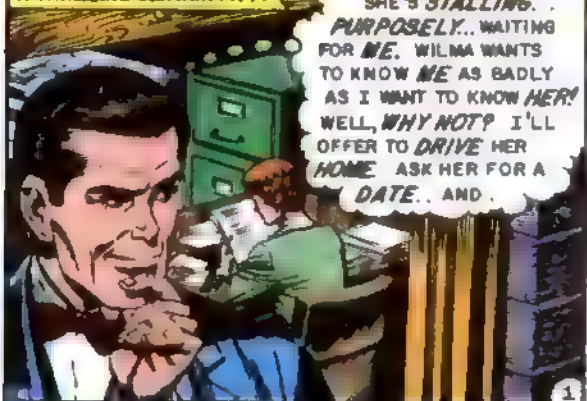
HIGH HEELS CLICKED AND HEAVY SOLES THUMPED ACROSS THE KENTILE FLOOR TO THE DOORWAY, EAGER TO REACH THE ELEVATORS THAT WOULD TAKE THEM TO STREET LEVEL AND FREEDOM TWENTY STORIES BELOW...

SHE'S BEAUTIFUL... A DOLL.  
A PERFECT DOLL...



SOON, EVERYONE IN THE OFFICE HAD LEFT... EVERYONE, THAT IS, EXCEPT WILMA AND RALPH. HIS HEART POUNDED WITH EXCITEMENT. WHAT, SINCE THAT MORNING, HAD BEEN MERELY A VAGUE DREAM, THEN A FAINT HOPE, WAS NOW A THRILLING CERTAINTY...

SHE'S STALLING.  
PURPOSELY... WAITING  
FOR ME. WILMA WANTS  
TO KNOW ME AS BADLY  
AS I WANT TO KNOW HER!  
WELL, WHY NOT? I'LL  
OFFER TO DRIVE HER  
HOME. ASK HER FOR A  
DATE... AND...





HEE, HEE! SEE, KIDDIES? EVEN AN OLD BAG LIKE ME CAN GET ROMANTIC. BUT DON'T GET UPSET. THERE IS GORE TO FOLLOW! FOR EXAMPLE, I COULD TELL YOU HOW THESE TWO MIGHT HAVE GOTTEN TOGETHER. WHAT A BLOOD-CURDLING STORY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE...



RALPH WOULD HAVE OFFERED WILMA A LIFT HOME IN HIS CAR. AND SHE'D HAVE ACCEPTED, HAPPILY. IN A FEW MINUTES, THEY'D HAVE BEEN CALLING EACH OTHER BY THEIR FIRST NAMES...

I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE, WILMA. I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO TAKE MY EYES OFF YOU ALL DAY.

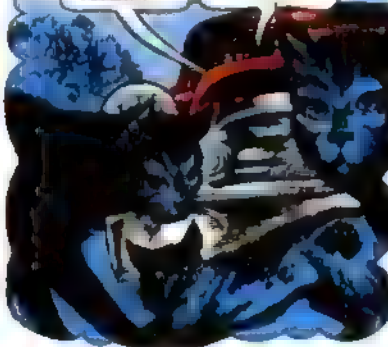
BETTER KEEP THEM ON THE ROAD, RALPH, IF YOU WANT TO GET ME HOME IN ONE PIECE!



AND AS THEY REACHED WILMA'S TREE-SHADED STREET IN THE SUBURBS, RALPH WOULD HAVE NOTICED SEVERAL BLACK CATS PLAYING IN HIS CAR'S PATH. AND WILMA WOULD HAVE CRIED OUT TO HIM IN AN ANGRY VOICE...

DON'T STOP FOR THEM! RUN THEM OVER! KILL THEM!

WILMA! WHAT...? I COULDN'T DO THAT!



I'M... I'M SORRY, RALPH! I JUST DESPISE CATS! DON'T ASK ME WHY! I CAN'T EXPLAIN...

I DON'T CARE, HONEY. AS LONG AS YOU DON'T DESPISE ME...



HE'D HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED WITH WILMA'S LOVELY HOME, AND, HOLDING HER HAND, RALPH WOULD HAVE ESCORTED HER TO THE DOOR...

HOW ABOUT GOING OUT WITH ME TOMORROW NIGHT, WILMA? WE CAN TAKE IN A SHOW... DINNER... ANYTHING YOU LIKE...

I'D LOVE TO GO OUT WITH YOU, RALPH, BUT NOT AT NIGHT THIS WEEK. I WANT TO GET MY SLEEP FOR MY NEW JOB. I WOULDN'T WANT TO GET FIRED NOW THAT YOU AND I...



SHE'D HAVE SMILED AT HIM WARMLY AND AGREED TO GO OUT WITH HIM THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY AFTERNOON. THEY'D HAVE TAKEN A WALK THROUGH THE PARK, GONE THROUGH THE ZOO. BY THEN, HE'D HAVE BEEN FEASTING HIS EYES ON HER BEAUTIFUL FACE. HER GLORIOUS FIGURE. THE WAY THE SUNLIGHT GLEAMED ON HER SOFT, RED HAIR...

AREN'T THEY CUTE, RALPH? LOOK HOW THAT ONE ALMOST TALKS TO YOU WITH HIS EYES. ALL RIGHT, FELLER.. HERE'S A PEANUT FOR YOU...



AND RALPH WOULD HAVE ADORED THE WAY WILMA'S FACE FLUSHED WITH ANGRY LOATHING AND HER GREEN EYES FLASHED THEIR HATE WHEN THEY'D COME TO THE PANTHER'S CAGE. FOR BY THEN, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN MADLY, BLINDLY IN LOVE WITH HER...

LOOK AT HIM, RALPH! SLY, SNEAKING, BEAST! CHOKO... OH, HOW I HATE CATS! TAKE ME AWAY FROM HERE... TAKE ME HOME!

SURE, HONEY...





SO RALPH WOULD HAVE TAKEN WILMA HOME...

AREN'T YOU GOING TO INVITE ME IN, WILMA?

ANOTHER TIME, RALPH DO YOU MIND? I HAVE A SPLITTING HEADACHE!



OH, I'M SORRY, BABY! AND I WAS GOING TO TAKE YOU OUT TONIGHT. HOWEVER, I'LL FORGIVE YOU IF YOU'LL LET ME PICK YOU UP TOMORROW...



OF COURSE, RALPH! WE CAN RIDE OUT INTO THE COUNTRY! I'D ENJOY THAT...

RALPH WOULD HAVE DRIVEN HOME, HIS CAR FLOATING LIKE A PINK CLOUD, CARRYING HIM TO A LAND OF HAPPY HUNGRY DREAMS. AND, SEEING WILMA'S BEAUTIFUL FACE IN HIS MIND, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN ONLY MOMENTARILY TROUBLED BY THE FLEETING THOUGHT...

NEVER SAW ANYONE WHO HATED CATS SO! OH, WELL... A PHOBIA, I SUPPOSE...



BUT, IN ANOTHER INSTANT, THAT MEMORY WOULD HAVE VANISHED...

TOMORROW, I'LL FIND JUST THE RIGHT SETTING TO PUT HER IN THE RIGHT MOOD... AND THEN I'LL ASK HER TO MARRY ME!



THE NEXT DAY WOULD HAVE BEEN A WONDERFUL ONE FOR RALPH... WARM AND SUNNY. AND, EXCEPT FOR THE SMALL, DISTURBING INCIDENT THAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED WHEN HE CALLED FOR WILMA...

DON'T BOTHER TO COME IN, RALPH! I'LL GET MY COAT AND BE RIGHT WITH YOU.

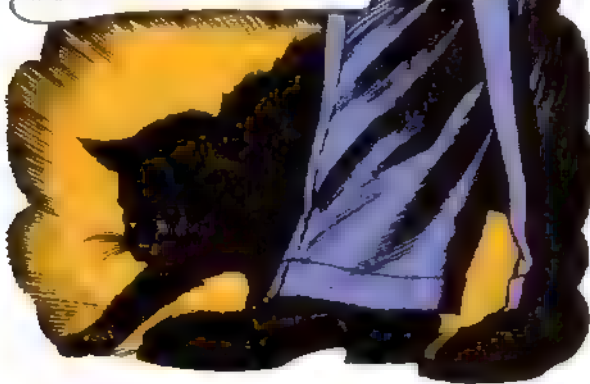


PECULIAR! SHE DOESN'T SEEM TO WANT TO LET ME PAST THE FRONT DOOR...



WILMA WOULD HAVE FORGOTTEN AND LEFT THE DOOR SLIGHTLY AJAR. AND THE BIG BLACK CAT WOULD'VE PADDED OUT, PURRING AND RUBBING AGAINST RALPH'S LEGS...

WELL I'LL BE DARNED! AND I THOUGHT WILMA COULDN'T STAND CATS...



AND A FEW SECONDS LATER, RALPH'S BEAUTIFUL RED-HEAD WOULD HAVE RUSHED OUT AFTER THE CAT, HER EYES BLAZING IN FURY. THE CAT WOULD'VE ARCHED ITS BACK, SPITTING AND BARING ITS FANGS AT THE SIGHT OF HER...

KEEP AWAY FROM HIM, YOU TREACHEROUS BLACK HELLION!

WILMA!





BUT THE INCIDENT WOULD HAVE BEEN QUICKLY FORGOTTEN BY RALPH, WHOSE HEART AND MIND WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO FULL OF LOVE FOR WILMA TO HARBOR ANY BAD THOUGHTS OF HER. AND THEY'D HAVE DRIVEN OUT TO SOME CALM, QUIET, RUSTIC SPOT... AND HE'D HAVE PROPOSED...

OH, DARLING! I DO WANT YOU... YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH BUT I CAN'T MARRY YOU...

BUT WHY, DEAR? IF TWO PEOPLE LOVE EACH OTHER, NOTHING ELSE SHOULD MATTER. WOULDN'T YOUR FAMILY APPROVE OF ME?



RALPH COULD HAVE BEEN SHOCKED AT THE COLD BITTER MALICE IN WILMA'S VOICE...

YOUR MOTHER, WILMA? HOW CAN YOU HATE YOUR OWN MOTHER?

SHE'S NOT MY REAL MOTHER! SHE'S MY STEP-MOTHER! OH, PLEASE! DON'T MAKE ME TALK ABOUT HER ANYMORE! IT'S SPOILED THE WHOLE DAY FOR ME...



HE'D HAVE GROWN MORE AND MORE UNEASY WITH EACH BLOCK HE'D PASSED BRINGING HIM NEARER TO THE DOONE HOME. AND BY THE TIME HE'D ARRIVED, HE'D HAVE BEEN SHAKING WITH NERVOUSNESS...

IF SHE'S AS BAD AS WILMA SAYS SHE IS, SHE MAY NOT LISTEN TO REASON. WELL... I'M NOT GOING TO BACK DOWN NOW...



I'D... I'D LIKE TO MEET YOUR FAMILY, WILMA... YOUR FATHER... YOUR MOTHER. THEY MUST BE WONDERFUL PEOPLE TO HAVE A DAUGHTER LIKE YOU...

MY FATHER IS DEAD! AND MY MOTHER... I HATE HER WITH ALL MY HEART AND SOUL... WITH EVERY OUNCE OF STRENGTH IN MY BODY... I HATE HER...



RALPH WOULD HAVE WORRIED ABOUT WHAT WILMA HAD SAID, AND THE NEXT MORNING, HE'D HAVE COME TO A DECISION. HE'D HAVE CALLED HIS BOSS AND TOLD A WHITE LIE...

I DON'T STAY OUT OFTEN, MR. PIERCE, BUT I'M JUST TOO SICK TO WORK TODAY...



AND HE'D HAVE LEFT HIS APARTMENT PLANNING EXACTLY WHAT HE WAS GOING TO SAY TO WILMA DOONE'S STEP-MOTHER...

I'LL MAKE HER UNDERSTAND THAT WILMA AND I LOVE EACH OTHER AND SHE CAN'T STAND IN OUR WAY...



RALPH WOULD HAVE FORCED HIMSELF TO WALK TO THE DOOR, AND HE'D HAVE PRESSED THE DOORBELL WITH TREMBLING HAND. IT WOULD HAVE SOUNDED LIKE THE KNELL OF DOOM TO HIM...

WHAT'S TAKING SO LONG? MAYBE SHE'S NOT HOME? MAYBE...

YES? WHO IS IT?





MRS. DOONE WOULD HAVE LET RALPH INTO THE HOUSE, AND HE'D HAVE BEEN ASTONISHED TO SEE WHAT A SWEET LOOKING LITTLE OLD LADY SHE WAS, WITH A KINDLY LIGHT IN HER SOFT BLUE EYES, AND A WRINKLED FACE WEALED IN A PLEASANT SMILE...

YOU'RE A FRIEND OF WILMA'S, YOU SAY? HOW NICE! WILMA'S AT WORK. BUT WHY DON'T YOU COME IN, MR. COWELL?

GOWAN, MRS. DOONE. RALPH COWAN. THANK YOU! THERE IS SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO TALK OVER WITH YOU.

RALPH WOULD HAVE LIKED THE OLD LADY RIGHT OFF. HER MOTHERLY MANNER WOULD'VE FILLED HIM WITH THE CONFIDENCE HE NEEDED TO LAY HIS HEART BARE BEFORE HER. AND AS HE SPOKE, HER CATS WOULD HAVE COME OUT AND PURRED AROUND HIM...

YOU SEE, MR. COWELL? THE MOMENT I SAW YOU, I KNEW YOU WERE GOOD! MY CATS LIKE YOU!

GOWAN, MRS. DOONE! BUT PLEASE...CALL ME RALPH! NOW, ABOUT WILMA AND ME! I... THAT IS... WE...

HE'D HAVE TOLD HER OF HIS LOVE FOR WILMA AND HE'D HAVE BEGGED FOR AND GOTTEN HER APPROVAL, AND BEFORE LONG...

FIVE-TWENTY? SAY! I'D BETTER BE GOING! WILMA WILL BE HOME FROM WORK SOON AND I DON'T THINK SHE'D LIKE MY SEEING YOU BEHIND HER BACK!

OH, POPPYCOCK, YOUNG MAN! I INSIST THAT YOU STAY TO DINNER. LET ME POUR SOME OF THIS WINE...

WHEN WILMA WOULD HAVE COME HOME, SHE'D HAVE SHOUTED ANGRILY AT HER STEP-MOTHER THE MOMENT SHE'D SEEN RALPH GROWING DROWSY FROM HIS SECOND GLASS OF WINE...

OH! H'LO, WILM... SEE...FEEL...SLEEPY...

YOU DID IT AGAIN, YOU WRETCH! YOU TRICKED ME AGAIN!

I DID NO SUCH THING! HE CAME OF HIS OWN ACCORD.

RALPH'S BODY WOULD HAVE GRADUALLY BEGUN TO ACME AS EVERY SINEW AND MUSCLE TIGHTENED, THEN GREW NUMB...

YOU PUT SOME OF THAT STUFF IN HIS WINE!

THAT 'STUFF' AS YOU CALL IT, IS MY BEST POTION...

AND HE WOULD HAVE REALIZED THAT HE COULD NO LONGER MOVE... THAT HE WAS PARALYZED. HE WOULD BE ABLE TO DO NOTHING BUT WATCH THE MARROW-CHILLING CHANGE COME OVER MOTHER DOONE...

NO, YOU WITCH! NO! I WON'T LET YOU HAVE HIM! NOT THIS ONE!

DON'T BE AN IDIOT, WILMA. HOW MANY OPPORTUNITIES DO WE HAVE TO GET FRESH MEAT? YOU...AND MY CATS?

DO YOU THINK MY CATS LIKE THE STINKING ROTTING DEAD MEAT YOU DRAG HOME FROM YOUR GRAVE-DIGGINGS, YOU BHOUL?

SHUT UP! SHUT UP!



YES, RALPH WOULD HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING... EXCEPT LISTEN AND WATCH AS THE OLD LADY SHARPENED THE CLEAVER AND WILMA PLEADED WITH HER...

PLEASE! NOT THIS ONE! I WANTED HIM... FOR A HUSBAND! A WOMAN NEEDS A MAN... EVEN IF SHE IS A GHoul. YOU GOT THE OTHERS! LEAVE THIS ONE. I'LL BRING THE CATS MEAT...

IT'S TOO LATE, YOU FOOL! HE KNOWS NOW! HOW COULD YOU EXPECT HIM TO LOVE YOU NOW...

HE'LL LOOK AT YOU AND HE WON'T SEE YOUR BEAUTY ANY MORE. HE'LL SEE YOU SCRATCHING AT GRAVES... DIGGING DOWN TO THE ROTTING COFFINS WITH THEIR MOLDY PUTRESCENT CORPSES... AND TEARING AT THEIR FLESH...

SHE'S RIGHT, RALPH! SHE IS! IT'S NO GOOD ANY MORE! I TRIED TO HIDE IT FROM YOU! I TRIED...

NO! NO! NO!



AND THE LAST THING RALPH WOULD HAVE REMEMBERED BEFORE HE DIED WAS THE ANGOUS SPITTING OF THE HUNGRY CATS AND THE WHINING OF THE CLEAVER AS THE OLD LADY HACKED AT HIM AND WILMA'S VOICE LAUGHING... LAUGHING...

I HOPE HE'S AS GOOD AS THE OTHERS...

YAAAAAAAASHH...



AS I SAID, KIDDIES, I COULD HAVE TOLD YOU THAT STORY! BUT ACTUALLY, YOU SEE, THAT'S NOT WHAT HAPPENED! THAT'S WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED TO RALPH IF HE DIDN'T... WELL, LET'S GO BACK! YOU REMEMBER HE WAS IN THE OFFICE, ALONE WITH WILMA, WALKING TOWARD THE FILE CABINETS. AND SHE WAS STALLING, AND GIVING HIM THE EYE... INVITING HIM TO A HORRIBLE FATE...



WELL, RALPH WAS LUCKY, KIDDIES! VERY LUCKY! HE WAS SO ABSORBED IN WILMA'S EXCITING BEAUTY, HE DIDN'T LOOK WHERE HE WAS GOING...

... MISSED THE FILE CABINETS, AND WENT OUT THE OPEN WINDOW, PLUNGING TWENTY STORIES TO THE STREET BELOW...



I'LL OFFER TO DRIVE HER HOME... ASK HER FOR A DATE... AND...  
OOOPS...



YAAAAAHHHHHHH...

WHY, THE STUPID...!!

...TO A VERY EASY DEATH!

THE OTHER END



# THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! AND NOW, IT'S WIND-UP TIME IN D.W.'S MORBID MAG. AND YOUR HOST IN THE CRYPT OF TERROR, THE CRYPT-KEEPER, IS READY TO PUT A FINAL FEEBLE FINIS TO THE FESTERING FESTIVITIES WITH A BLOOD-CURDLING YARN ABOUT THE FROZEN NORTH. THIS CHILLING TALE IS CALLED...

## THE LIGHT IN HIS LIFE!

THE WIND HOWLED AND BLEWICILY AROUND THE LONE MAN AS FLOODING SNOWDRIFTS STUTTERING THROUGH THE WINTRY WASTELANDS. SNOW STILL LAY IN A THICK WHITE CARPET AS FAR AS HIS ACHING, TEARING EYES COULD SEE, EVEN THOUGH THE SPRING THAWS HAD BEGUN BACK AT THE RIVER. WHEEZING... HIS BREATH FROSTING WHITELY IN A CLOUD AND TURNING TO ICE ON HIS CHEEKS... THE MAN STUMBLED ON, AND AT LAST SAW THE WELCOME LIGHT GLEAMING INTO THE GATHERING DARKNESS AHEAD... THE TRAPPER'S CABIN... NESTLED AMONG THE TOWERING SNOW-LADEN PINES...



HE DIDN'T HAVE TO KNOCK WITH HIS NUMBED HANDS. THE DOOR OPENED BEFORE HIM AND HE LURCHED IN ON HALF-FROZEN FEET, ESCORTED BY A LAST FLURRY OF SNOW, WHIPPED IN BY THE SHRIEKING, CRUEL WIND...





AFTER A WHILE, AS THE PENETRATING WARMTH OF THE FIREPLACE STOLE THROUGH THE VISITOR'S SHIVERING BODY AND THE BLUENESS DRAINED AWAY FROM HIS LIPS, HE SPOKE...

LORD! I NEVER KNEW ALASKA WOULD BE *THIS COLD*! MY NAME'S *NED DRAKE*... JUST UP FROM THE STATES LOOKING TO *SETTLE DOWN* IN THESE PARTS AND TRY MY LUCK AT *TRAPPING*...

HOWDY, NED! WELL, I'VE BEEN TRAPPING THESE PARTS FOR *QUITE A SPELL*... AND I'M READY TO PULL UP STAKES AND *QUIT*, MYSELF...

YES, I *KNOW*. THEY TOLD ME BACK AT THE SETTLEMENT THAT JAKE BARROW WOULD SELL OUT HIS CABIN AND GEAR. I CAME TO MAKE *TERMS* AND BUY YOU OUT...

WELL, *GOOD! GOOD!* JUST LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WILLIN' T' PAY! I'M READY TO *START PACKIN'* RIGHT AWAY...

THE TWO MEN SETTLED THE MATTER QUICKLY, AND NED DRAKE WAS SURPRISED AT THE REASONABLE TERMS. SOMEHOW, JAKE BARROW APPEARED *ANXIOUS* TO GO... WHICH SEEMED ODD TO NED...

PARDON MY *CURIOSITY*, JAKE... BUT *WHY* ARE YOU QUITTING? EVERYONE SAYS YOU GOT *MIGHTY GOOD TRAPPINGS* UP HERE... PLENTY OF SILVER FOX... LYNX... BEAVER... *EVERYTHING*!

SON, THIS IS A *LONELY LIFE*... *MIGHTY LONELY*! IT CAN GET ON YOUR NERVES AFTER A WHILE! YOU *MARRIED?*

WHY, *YES!* MY WIFE'S WAITING BACK AT THE *SETTLEMENT*! SOON AS THE *THAW* CLEARS THE TRAIL, I'LL BRING HER UP. MUST BE *GOZY* HERE THROUGH THE WINTERS, SITTIN' BY THE WARM FIRE AND...

*GOZY*, YOU SAY! LE ME WARN YOU, SON! ALASKA'S GOT *LONG, HARSH WINTERS*! SOMETIMES YOU GET SNOWED IN FOR *WEEKS... EVEN MONTHS*...

A MAN AND HIS WIFE TRAPPED IN A LITTLE CABIN FOR SO LONG... WITH NOTHIN' T' DO BUT LOOK AT EACH OTHER... *WELL, IT AIN'T SO GOZY!*

SPEAKING OF *WIVES*, JAKE... *WHERE'S YOURS?* THEY SAID BACK AT THE SETTLEMENT...

SHE... SHE... WELL, SON, IT'S A *LONG STORY*. YOU OUGHT TO *HEAR IT* THOUGH. YOU MIGHT *THINK TWICE* ABOUT BRINGIN' A *WOMAN* UP HERE. AN' SINCE I CAN'T *LEAVE* TILL MORNIN' *ANYWAY*, I MIGHT AS WELL *TELL IT* TO YUH...

THE TWO MEN SETTLED DOWN, STUFFED THEIR PIPES, AND LIT UP. CURIOSITY CONSUMED NED DRAKE AS HE WAITED FOR THE STORY TO BEGIN. JAKE'S EYES NARROWED, FIXING THEMSELVES UPON THE FLICKERING OIL LAMP ON THE TABLE. THE TRAPPER STARED MOODILY AT THE DANCING FLAME WITH A SECRET SMILE TUGGING AT HIS LIPS, BEFORE HIS VOICE ROSE ABOVE THE WIND, WHAILING OUTSIDE LIKE A LOST SOUL...

HAD A *BLIZZARD* BACK ABOUT THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY. IT WAS A *WHOPPER*...



'SNOW PILED UP TO THE ROOF. WE COULDN'T EVEN OPEN THE DOOR WITH THE SNOW PRESSIN' AGAINST IT. MIRANDA AND I KNEW WE WERE SNOWED IN FOR QUITE A LONG SPELL....'



'DAY AFTER DAY, THEN, THERE WAS NOTHIN' T'DO BUT EAT AN' SLEEP AND KILL TIME. MIRANDA PLAYED SOLITAIRE MOSTLY...THAT, AND ATE...'



'FUNNY HOW A SOUND LIKE MUNCHIN' CAN GET ON YOUR NERVES WHEN IT GOES ON LIKE THAT ALL THE TIME. IF IT WEREN'T FOR MY BOOKS, IT WOULD'VE PROBABLY DRIVEN ME NUTS AFTER THE FIRST WEEK. BUT I KEPT READIN' AND IGNORIN' MIRANDA'S STUFFIN' HERSELF...'



'ME, I'M A GREAT READER! HAD A GOOD STOCK OF BOOKS ON HAND THOU. HER EATIN' AND MY READIN' KEPT US OUT OF EACH OTHER'S HAIR, I GUESS. BUT THE SNOW KEPT FALLIN'...PILIN' UP..AN' WE WERE KEPT PRISONERS LONGER THAN WE EXPECTED...'

EVEN IF I COULD DO MY WAY OUT, I COULDN'T MAKE IT TO THE SETTLEMENT! LOOKS LIKE WE'RE TRAPPED HERE ANOTHER MONTH, MIRANDA...



'WITH ME NOT ABLE TO GET OUT AND GET TO THE SETTLEMENT FOR SUPPLIES, IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG BEFORE I REALIZED...'

FOOD'S RUNNIN' LOW! JERKED BEEF'S ALL GONE. ONE CAN OF BEANS LEFT...A LITTLE FLOUR... SOME DRIED FISH YOU GOTTA STOP EATING ALL THE TIME, MIRANDA! WE GOTTA GO ON STRICT RATIONING...

STOP EATING, JAKE! GO ON RATIONING! NO, JAKE! PLEASE...



'TO MIRANDA, ALWAYS A HOGGISH EATER, THE IDEA OF CONSERVING FOOD WAS THE WORST KIND OF TORTURE. SHE WAS UNWAVINGLY FRUITFUL ON AS EACH MEAL WAS REDUCED TO A BIT OF DRIED FISH, WASHED DOWN WITH SOME WEAK COFFEE...'

JAKE! FOR GOD'S SAKE! I'M HUNGRY! I'M STARVING TO DEATH! I CAN'T STAND IT...



'MIRANDA POINTED TO MY OIL LAMP...'

WHAT ABOUT THAT?...THE WHALE OIL YOU BURN IN THAT LAMP...JUST TO READ SOME STUPID BOOKS? THAT'S GOOD RICH FOOD...WHALE OIL! AND YOU'RE WASTING IT!

DON'T YOU EVER TOUCH THAT OIL! NEVER! THAT'S FOR ME...TO READ BY! UNDERSTAND!





"MIRANDA DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, OF COURSE. SHE COULDN'T SEE THAT MY BOOKS...MY PRECIOUS READING...WAS A TREASURE THAT KEPT ME FROM GOING MAD...OCCUPYING MY MIND DURING THOSE LONG DRAGGING HOURS...DAYS...WEEKS...ETERNITIES..."

OH, YOU WON'T *STARVE*, MIRANDA...NOT WITH ALL THAT *FAT* YOU FLOAT IN! YOU COULD PROBABLY *HIBERNATE* FOR *WEEKS*...LIKE A *BEAR*. SO STOP TRYING TO MAKE ME *PITY* YOU!

SO...SOB...  
SO *HUNGRY*!

"TROUBLE WAS, MIRANDA HAD NOTHING TO KEEP HER MIND OCCUPIED...NOTHING BUT THE THOUGHT OF HOW HER GNAWING STOMACH CRAVED FOOD. IT WAS A DAY OR SO LATER...WHEN I WAS REFILLING THE LAMP...THAT I NOTICED..."

THAT'S FUNNY! OIL'S GETTING LOW! THE LAMP ISN'T BURNING IT UP THAT FAST! UNLESS...UNLESS...

"I FOUGHT OFF SLEEP THAT NIGHT...FOUGHT TO KEEP AWAKE. AND SURE ENOUGH, WHEN MIRANDA THOUGHT I WAS ASLEEP, SHE GOT UP OUT OF BED, TIPTOED TO THE WHALE-OIL KEG, AND..."

GURGLE...  
GURGLE...

STOP IT!  
STOP...

"I SPRANG AT HER IN A FURY...CURSED HER...PULLED THE KEYS FROM HER FAT GREASY PAWS..."

YOU USUALLY TUG OF LARD, YOU DRINKING MY...MY...  
IT'S EMPTY! GONE!  
HOW WILL I SEE,  
NOW? HOW WILL  
I READ MY  
BOOKS?

YOU  
AND YOUR  
STUPID  
BOOKS!  
WELL MY  
STOMACH  
IS MORE  
IMPORTANT...  
TO ME!

"FOR A MOMENT I WANTED TO *KILL* HER. AND THEN I *REMEMBERED*! EVEN WITH THE WHALE OIL GONE, I COULD STILL READ..."

TALLOW CANDLES...MADE FROM WHALE BLUBBER! THEY'LL GIVE ME THE LIGHT I NEED...

"BY BURNING SEVERAL CANDLES AT ONCE, I OBTAINED ENOUGH LIGHT TO READ BY AND ONCE MORE I SETTLED DOWN TO LONG, QUIET, SATISFYING HOURS OF INDULGING IN MY PRINTED PLEASURES..."

"UNTIL, ONE DAY..."

THE CANDLES! WHY THERE'RE ONLY A FEW LEFT! BUT I DIDN'T BURN THEM! THERE WERE PLENTY...OF...MIRANDA!  
MIRANDA!



**MIRANDA! DID YOU TOUCH MY CANDLES? ANSWER ME...**

**OF COURSE NOT! LET ME GO! WH-WHAT WOULD I DO WITH THEM? MAYBE... UH...MAYBE THE RATS! SURE! THAT'S IT!**

**'SHE WAS LYING! COVERING UP! I KNEW IT! I TRIED TO FORCE THE TRUTH FROM HER BUT SHE KEPT DENYING IT...**

**YOU FEMALE SWINE! WHERE ARE MY CANDLES? ANSWER ME!**

**JAKE...DON'T! LET ME GO! IT'S RATS! I TELL YOU! I HEARD THEM GNAWING LAST NIGHT!**

**'I WANTED TO STRANGLE HER BUT MY FINGERS ONLY SANK INTO FLABBY FAT FOLDS OF HER NECK, AND I DIDN'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO PENETRATE THAT PROTECTION...**

**BLOATED TUB OF LARD...**

**'I GAVE UP! I LET HER GO. BUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, AS I LAY SLEEPLESS AND TOSSING, I HEARD THE GNAWING AND MUNCHING...**

**CHOMP... CHOMP... CHOMP...**

**WHAT'S THAT? CHEWING SOUNDS! IS IT RATS, AFTER ALL, AT MY CANDLES?**

**'YEAH, IT WAS A RAT, ALL RIGHT! A BIG, FAT FEMALE RAT NAMED MIRANDA...**

**...EATING MY CANDLES! YOU! YOU...**

**THERE WAS ONLY ONE CANDLE LEFT. I SCREAMED AT HER.**

**LEAVE IT! YOU ATE ALL THE OTHERS! DOZENS OF THEM! LEAVE ME THE LAST ONE! PLEASE! PLEASE!**

**I'M HUNGRY!**

**'SHE FOUGHT FIERCELY... LIKE A WILD ELEPHANT, SHE MANAGED TO SHOVE ME AWAY AND CRAM THE LAST CANDLE DOWN HER GREEDY GULLET...**

**DIRTY, FAT, OVERSTUFFED SLOB...**

**CHOMP... CHOMP...**



**'THEN SHE WIPED HER BLUBBERY LIPS DELIBERATELY... IN FRONT OF ME GRINNING...'**

**I'LL KILL YOU FOR THAT, MIRANDA! I'LL...**

**GO AHEAD! SHOOT! NAH, NAH! SHOOT!**

**'SHE LAUGHED AT ME... MOCKED ME... KNOWING SHE WAS SAFE...'**

**THEN WHAT WILL YOU DO?... SIT HERE WITH MY BODY ROTTING AWAY INTO A STINKING MESS?**

**SHUT UP! SHUT UP! YOU...**

**'EVEN THE WOOD SUPPLY FOR THE FIREPLACE WAS RUNNING LOW. MY EYES TURNED BLOODSHOT AND SMARTED AND GAVE ME INTOLERABLE HEADACHES, AS I WAS FORCED TO READ BY THE DIM WAVERING FIRE-LIGHT...'**

**SHE CAN'T EAT WOOD, THANK HEAVENS! BUT MY EYES... LORD...**

**'SUDDENLY I THOUGHT OF ONE LAST WAY TO FURNISH MYSELF WITH GOOD READING LIGHT...'**

**THESE UNCURED FURS! I COULD SCRAPE OFF THE EXCESS ANIMAL FAT... BOIL IT DOWN... BURN IT IN THE LAMP...**

**'I SPENT THE WHOLE DAY CAREFULLY SCRAPING OFF EVERY SHRED OF FATTY TISSUE STILL CLINGING TO THE HIDES, HOARDING EACH KNIFE SLIVER INTO A CAN, AS IF IT WERE GOLD...'**

**PHEW! AWFUL SMELL! BUT I'LL BE ABLE TO READ MY BOOKS AGAIN WITHOUT GOING BLIND!**

**'I FELL, EXHAUSTED, INTO BED THAT NIGHT. EVERY MUSCLE IN MY BODY ACHED. I WAS TIRED BUT HAPPY...'**

**TOMORROW, I'LL RENDER THE FAT... BOIL IT DOWN IN THE IRON POT... GOOD ANIMAL GREASE... TO BURN... TO READ BY...  
YAWN...**

**'BUT IN THE MORNING, WHEN I LOOKED INTO THE CAN THAT SHOULD HAVE HELD THE SCRAPS OF ANIMAL-FAT THAT I'D PAINFULLY COLLECTED, BIT BY BIT...'**

**EMPTY! EMPTY! MIRANDA! DID YOU**



'SHE SAT THERE, GRINNING...WIPING THE LAST OF THE PLATE...LICKING HER STUBBY LITTLE GREASY FINGERS...AND MOCKING ME...'

DID I *WHAT*, JAKE? DID I *EAT* YOUR *ANIMAL-FAT SHAVINGS*? WELL, OF COURSE, YOU FOOL! KIND OF *RANCID*...BUT I DIDN'T MIND! I WAS *HUNGRY*...



'I LOOKED AT HER...AND YET I DIDN'T SEE HER, I SAW MY LAST CHANCE SLIPPING AWAY. I FELT MY EYES SMART AND TEAR EVEN IN ANTICIPATION OF READING BY FIRELIGHT AGAIN. I FELT MY HEADACHE RETURN...THROBBING...THROBBING. AND MIRANDA SWAM BEFORE ME...LIKE A BIG FAT RUBBER BALLOON, SWINGING IN THE WIND...'

JAKE? WHAT IS IT, JAKE?  
JAKE!



JAKE BARROW PAUSED. HE SHRUGGED AND SIGHED. HE WAS STILL STARING FIXEDLY AT THE HISSING, DANCING FLAME OF THE OIL LAMP. THEN, HE WENT ON...

SO THAT'S THE *STORY*, SON! THAT'LL GIVE YOU AN *IDEA* OF WHAT AN ALASKAN WINTER CAN *DO* TO A MAN AND WIFE *SNOWBOUND* TOGETHER...

BUT, *JAKE*? YOU DIDN'T TELL ME WHAT *HAPPENED* TO MIRANDA!



JAKE LOOKED AT HIS GUEST AND SMILED...

SEND YOUR *WIFE* BACK TO *NONE*, SON! GET IN A *GOOD SUPPLY* OF *BOOKS*! NOTHING LIKE *CURLIN'* UP WITH A *GOOD BOOK* BY AN *OIL LAMP* ON DARK WINTRY SNOWED-IN NIGHTS...

THE *OIL LAMP*? IT...I...I *THOUGHT* YOU SAID MIRANDA *DRANK UP* ALL THE *WHALE OIL*! AND...AND THOSE *TALLOW CANDLES*...WHERE DID YOU GET *THOSE*?



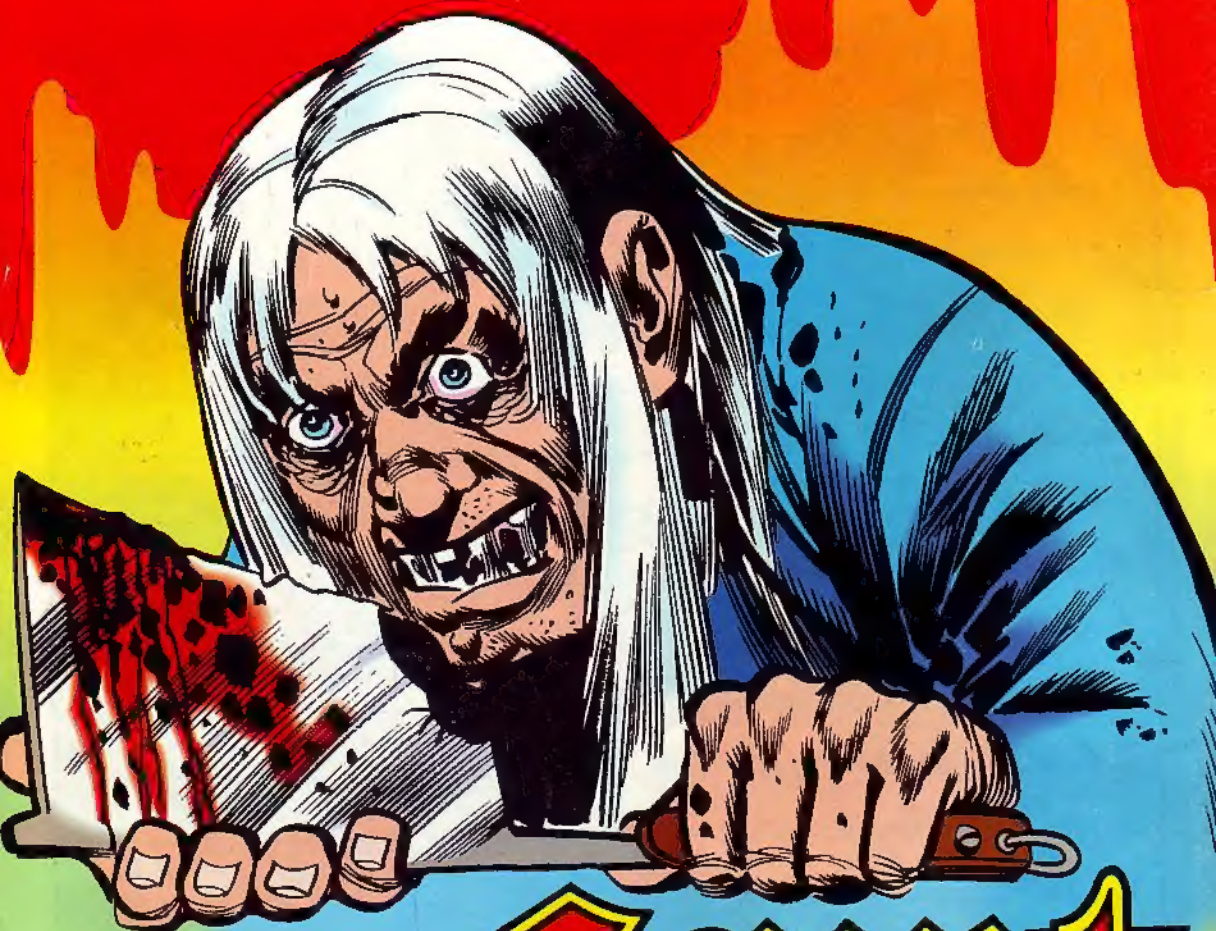
BESIDE JAKE, ON THE TABLE, THE OIL LAMP FLICKERED. JAKE GLANCED AT ITS FLAME AND BACK TO NED, AND ONCE MORE, THAT SECRET LITTLE SMILE TUGGED AT HIS MOUTH...



HEH, HEH! OF COURSE, ALL YOU FIENDS HAVE *GUESSED* JAKE BARROW'S CHARMING *SECRET*! YEP, HE FINALLY GOT SO *BOILED UP* OVER HIS WIFE, *SHE* WAS *BOILED UP*, *PERIOD*! AND A *'FAT'* CHANCE SHE HAD, TOO! SHE *COULDN'T RUN AWAY*! THE ONLY *RUNNING* SHE DID WAS FROM THE *BIG IRON POT* INTO JAKE'S *WHALE OIL KEG*! YOU MIGHT SAY MIRANDA WAS *FINALLY* THE *LIGHT* IN JAKE'S LIFE! WELL, WE'LL ALL SEE YOU *NEXT* IN MY *MAG. TALES FROM THE CRYPT*! 'BYE, NOW!







# The CRYPT KEEPER

